

## Middle East news helps Bush in polls

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- Kick-starting Middle East peace talks and positive news from Iraq has driven U.S. President George Bush's poll approval ratings up 6 percentage points. A Gallup poll released Wednesday shows the president's approval rating jumped to 37 percent from his early November rating of 31 percent, which USA Today said was a result of him orchestrating a Middle East summit in Annapolis, Md., last month and encouraging news of decreasing violence in Baghdad. Various Bush critics told the newspaper that averaging all recent polls gives the leader a 33 percent approval rating. Regardless, if Bush's rating remains below 40 percent for the balance of his term, he would pass U.S. President Harry Truman's record for longest stretch below that mark, the newspaper said. White House spokesman Tony Fratto was dismissive of any poll discussion. "We don't pay attention to polls," he told USA Today. "We'll stay focused on the work we have to do, and polls will take care of themselves."

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